

Mingrelian language

Megrelian (მარგალური ნინა *margaluri nina*) is a Kartvelian language spoken in Western Georgia (regions of Samegrelo and Abkhazia), primarily by the Megrelians. The language was also called **Iverian** (Georgian *iveriuli ena*) in the early 20th century. Since Mingrelian has historically been only a regional language within boundaries of both historical Georgian states and modern Georgia, the number of younger people speaking it has decreased substantially, with UNESCO designating it as a "definitely endangered language".^[3]

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Megrelian	
მარგალური ნინა <i>margaluri nina</i>	
Native to	Georgia
Region	Samegrelo, Abkhazia
Ethnicity	Megrelians
<div>Native speakers</div>	344,000 (2015) ^[1]
<div>Language family</div>	<div>Kartvelian <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Karto-Zan<ul style="list-style-type: none">Zan<ul style="list-style-type: none">Megrelian</div>
Writing system	Georgian script
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	xmf
Glottolog	ming1252 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/ming1252) ^[2]
 <div>DISTRIBUTION OF THE KARTVELIAN (SOUTH CAUCASIAN) LANGUAGES</div> <div> GEORGIAN MINGRELIAN ABKHAZIAN LAZ SWAN OSSETIAN CHECHEN-INGUSH DARGI TABASSARI ABKHAZ GEORGIAN MINGRELIAN ABKHAZIAN LAZ SWAN OSSETIAN CHECHEN-INGUSH DARGI TABASSARI ABKHAZ</div> <div> RUSSIA GEORGIA TURKEY ARMENIA AZERBAIJAN</div>	

Distribution and status

No reliable figures exist for the number of Mingrelian native speakers, but it is estimated to be between 300,000 and 500,000. Most speakers live in the Samegrelo (Mingrelia) region of Georgia, which comprises the Odishi Hills and the Kolkheti Lowlands, from the Black Sea coast to the Svan Mountains and the

Tskhenistskali River. Smaller enclaves existed in Abkhazia,^[4] but the ongoing civil unrest there has displaced many Mingrelian speakers to other regions of Georgia. Their geographical distribution is relatively compact, which has helped to promote the transmission of the language between generations.

Mingrelian is generally written with the Georgian alphabet, but has no written standard or official status. Almost all speakers are bilingual; they use Mingrelian mainly for familiar and informal conversation, and Georgian (or, for expatriate speakers, the local official language) for other purposes.

In the summer of 1999, books of the Georgian poet Murman Lebanidze were burned in the Mingrelian capital, Zugdidi, after he made disparaging remarks about the Mingrelian language.^[5]

History

Mingrelian is one of the Kartvelian languages. It is closely related to Laz, from which it has differentiated mostly in the last 500 years, after the northern (Mingrelian) and southern (Laz) communities were separated by Turkic invasions. It is somewhat less closely related to Georgian (the two branches having separated in the first millennium BC or earlier) and even more distantly related to Svan (which is believed to have branched off in the 2nd millennium BC or earlier).^[6] Mingrelian is not mutually intelligible with any of those other languages, although it is said that its speakers can recognize many Laz words.

Some linguists refer to Mingrelian and Laz as grouped within the Zan languages.^[7] Zan had already split into Mingrelian and Laz variants by early modern times, however, and it is not customary to speak of a unified Zan language today.

The oldest surviving texts in Mingrelian date from the 19th century, and are mainly ethnographical literature. The earliest linguistic studies of Mingrelian include a phonetic analysis by Aleksandre Tsagareli (1880), and grammars by Ioseb Kipshidze (1914) and Shalva Beridze (1920). From 1930 to 1938 several newspapers were published in Mingrelian, such as *Kazakhishi Gazeti*, *Komuna*, *Samargalosh Chai*, *Narazenish Chai*, and *Samargalosh Tutumi*. More recently, there has been some revival of the language, with the publication of dictionaries—Mingrelian–Georgian by Otar Kajaia, and Mingrelian–German by Otar Kajaia and Heinz Fähnrich—and poetry books by Lasha Gakharia, Edem Izoria, Lasha Gvasalia, Guri Otobaia, Giorgi Sichinava, Jumber Kukava, and Vakhtang Kharchilava, as well as books and magazines published by Jehovah's Witnesses.^[8]

Phonology

Vowels

Mingrelian has five primary vowels *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*. The Zugdidi-Samurzaqano dialect has a sixth, *ə*, which is the result of reduction of *i* and *u*.

Mingrelian vowels

	Front	Back	
		unrounded	rounded
High	i [i] ɒ	(ə [ə]) ɔ	u [u] ɥ
Mid	e [ɛ] ɟ		o [ɔ] ɯ
Low		a [a] ɔ	

Consonants

The consonant inventory of Mingrelian is almost identical to Laz, Georgian, and Svan.

Mingrelian consonants

		<u>Labial</u>	<u>Dental</u>	<u>Alveolar</u>	<u>Velar</u>	<u>Uvular</u>	<u>Glottal</u>
<u>Nasal</u>		m [m] ო	n [n] ნ				
<u>Plosive</u>	<u>voiced</u>	b [b] ბ	d [d] დ		g [g] გ		
	<u>voiceless</u>	p [p] პ	t [t] თ		k [k] კ		ʔ [ʔ] ე
	<u>ejective</u>	p̣ [p̣] პ̣	ṭ [ṭ] თ̣		ḳ [ḳ] კ̣	q̣ [q̣] ყ	
<u>Affricate</u>	<u>voiced</u>		ʒ [d͡ʒ] ჯ	ʃ [d͡ʃ] ჭ			
	<u>voiceless</u>		c [t͡s] ც	ç [t͡ʃ] ჩ			
	<u>ejective</u>		ç̣ [t͡ʃ̣] ჩ̣	č̣ [t͡ʃ̣] ' ჩ̣			
<u>Fricative</u>	<u>voiced</u>	v [v] ვ	z [z] ზ	ʒ [ʒ] ჯ	ɣ [ɣ] ლ		
	<u>voiceless</u>		s [s] ს	ʃ [ʃ] შ	x [x] ხ		h [h] ჰ
<u>Trill</u>				r [r] რ			
<u>Approximant</u>	<u>central</u>			y [j] ი			
	<u>lateral</u>		l [l] ლ				

Phonetic processes

Vowel reduction

Certain pairs of vowels reduce to single vowels:

- *ae* and *ai* → *ee* → *e*
- *ao*, *oa* and *oo* → *aa* → *a*
- *ou* → *uu* → *u*

In Zugdidi-Samurzaqano dialect the vowels *i* and *u* also often reduce to *ə*.

Pre-consonant change of velar *g*

Before consonants, *g* → *r*.

Positional change of uvular *q'* sound

In word-initial prevocalic and intervocalic positions, *q'* → *ʔ*. Before the consonant *v*, *q'* → *ʔ/ḳ*.

Regressive assimilation of consonants

The common types are:

- voicing/devoicing of voiceless/voiced consonants before voiced/voiceless ones (respectively).
- glottalization of consonants before the glottalized ones and the glottal stop.

Progressive dissimilation

If the stem contains *r* then the suffixes *-ar* and *-ur* transform to *-al* and *-ul*, e.g. *xorga* (*Khorga*, the village) → *xorg-ul-i* ("Khorgan"). The rule is not valid if in the stem with *r* an *l* appears later, e.g. *mar ṭvili* ("Martvili", the town) → *mar ṭvil-ur-i* (adj. "Martvilian")

In a stem with voiceless affricates or voiceless sibilants, a later *č* is deaffricated to *d*, e.g. *orcxonč'i* → *orcxondi* "comb", *č'anč'i* → *č'andi* "fly (insect)", *isinč'i* → *isindi* "arrow", etc.

The transformation of *l*

- in all dialects of Mingrelian, before consonants *l* → *r*.
- in the Martvili subdialect in word-initial prevocalic position, *l* → *y* → *∅* and in intervocalic position *l* → *∅*

Intervocalic deletion of *v*

Between the vowels the organic *v* disappears, e.g. *xvavi* (Geo. "abundance, plenty") → **xvai* → *xvee* (id.), *mṭevani* (Geo. "raceme") → *ṭiani* (id.), etc.

Phonetic augmentation *n*

Before the stops and affricates, an inorganic augmentation *n* may appear (before labials *n* → *m*).

Alphabet

Megrelian is written in the Mkhedruli script.

Mkhedruli	Transcription	IPA transcription
ა	a	ɑ
ბ	b	b
გ	g	g
დ	d	d
ე	e	ɛ
ვ	v	v
ზ	z	z
თ	t	t
ი	i	i
კ	k	k'
ლ	l	l
მ	m	m
ნ	n	n
ო	y	j
პ	o	ɔ
ჟ	p	p'
რ	ž	ʒ
ს	r	r
ტ	s	s
ყ	t	t'
უ	u	u
ფ	ə	ə
ც	p	p
ძ	k	k
წ	ʎ	ʎ
ჭ	q'	q'
ხ	ʔ	ʔ
შ	š	ʃ
ჩ	č	tʃ
ც	c	t͡s
ძ	ʒ	d͡z
წ	ć	t͡s'
ჭ	č'	tʃ'

b	x	x
ႁ	ႂ	ႃ
ႄ	h	h

Grammar

Dialects

The main dialects and subdialects of Mingrelian are:

- Zugdidi-Samurzakano or Northwest dialect
 - Dzhvari
- Senaki or Southeast dialect
 - Martvili-Bandza
 - Abasha

Famous speakers

- Lavrenti Beria, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin's chief of secret police
- Konstantine Gamsakhurdia, one of the most influential Georgian writers of the 20th century
- Zviad Gamsakhurdia, first president of post-Soviet Georgia
- Antisa Khvichava, claimed world's oldest person (purportedly 132 years old at the time of her death in 2012).^[9]

References

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External links

- TITUS Caucasica: Megrelisch (<http://titus.fkidg1.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/caucasica/mingrel/adscham.htm>) (in German)
- Otari Kajaia's Megrelian-Georgian dictionary (<http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/etca/cauc/megr/kajaia/kajai.htm>) at TITUS.
- Megrelian Project (<https://web.archive.org/web/20110927085309/http://www.ling.lu.se/projects/Megrelian/>) at Lund University, Sweden
- Wikitongues: Valerian speaking Mingrelian (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5mO8vWRPo8>)
- Article on the situation in 2017 (<https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/nikolaus-von-twicke/do-you-speak-mingrelian>) from OpenDemocracy

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